

Ambassador White's Remarks
AMCHAM Holiday Reception
Ambassador's Residence, Port-au-Prince
December 6, 2012

Mr. Prime Minister,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to my residence this evening and continue the annual tradition of the U.S. Embassy-AmCham Haiti holiday reception.

Since my arrival in Haiti, I have had the pleasure of meeting the AmCham president and board of directors, as well as many of you here tonight. I am proud to share the stage tonight with my good friend Philippe Armand, and want to thank the AmCham and tonight's sponsors for their enthusiastic support. The American Embassy in Port-au-Prince and AmCham Haiti have a long history of cooperation in our efforts to

encourage trade and investment between our two countries, and to ensure that Haiti's economy creates jobs and empowers the Haitian people.

I'm proud to report that our relationship with AmCham is as close as ever, and I have been impressed with the work AmCham is doing to support Haitian and American businesses, and to promote Haiti as an investment destination. With the support of organizations like AmCham, Haiti has an historic opportunity to capture the interest, the energy, and the capital of the international business community, and to advance Haiti's economy in very exciting ways.

Many of you know that this is not my first time serving in Haiti. I previously worked for USAID here between 1985 and 1990. When I arrived in Haiti in 1985, businesses were growing. At their peak, Haiti's factories employed 100,000 workers, putting the country at the center of economic activity in the Caribbean. Cruise ships brought hundreds of

thousands of tourists to Haiti every year, not just to exclusive beaches, but to the major cities, where they contributed to Haiti's economy.

By the time I left Haiti five years later, much of that prosperity had been lost. For that very reason, I am so excited to have returned to a Haiti that is on the rise and on the right track, at a time when the government and private sector are working together to bring about meaningful change, and to work toward the President and Prime Minister's goal of making Haiti an emerging economy by 2030.

As we work together to improve Haiti's business climate, to grow the economy, and to create jobs, it is important to show Haiti in its best light, full of potential, with a hardworking and industrious people, many natural resources, and committed partners. But it is also important to ask tough questions. HAITI IS TOO RICH TO BE POOR!

Why doesn't business come to Haiti? And what is being done to change that?

Haiti's international image is tarnished, there is no doubt. Many of you are working to change that, and I am working very hard to improve Haiti's image as well. Let me tell you every single time there are tires burning in the streets and rocks thrown, Haiti's image suffers. Violence is NOT good for Haiti or for you. This Administration is willing and ready to listen to ways to improve Haiti, to right wrongs, JOIN THEM!

Of course, Haiti's problems aren't only about image. For too long, investors coming to Haiti have been discouraged by the uncertainty of doing business here, by lagging infrastructure, and by an unreliable and expensive energy supply, to name a few of the greatest challenges.

Investors and investment shy away from Haiti because they do not believe the rule of law is strong and their rights will not be protected. But

I do believe Haiti now has a government committed to the rule of law and the consolidation of democratic institutions. It is a work in progress. But there is progress. The police force is getting better every single day. We finally have a CSPJ that actually works and is committed to a Haiti that does not tolerate corruption or bribes. We have a body of professionals that does not care what your last name is or how rich you are – we have the beginning of something really good. DO NOT stop the progress; Haiti cannot afford to go backwards. We cannot let this happen. ALL OF US here tonight can only afford an honest Haiti.

I DO sense that there is momentum in Haiti to change the way government and business interact, and to provide the private sector with the certainty it needs to make sound business decisions. There is finally the necessary focus in Haiti to reform the country's commercial code, adopt modern banking laws, combat money laundering, enable electronic commerce, and genuinely open Haiti's economy to the 21st century. There are efforts underway to reduce the time it takes to register a business,

enabling more actors to enter the formal economy and contribute to the country's tax base. We are nowhere near where we need to be but there IS progress. I applaud these efforts, and I assure you the United States government wholeheartedly supports them. To maintain the momentum, the private sector must champion the pro-business reforms that will benefit not only their bottom line, but also ensure that growth and prosperity are broadly shared across Haitian society.

For years, the sorry state of Haiti's infrastructure delayed the entry of goods into the country and hindered the efforts of exporters. Today, roads are being built across the country, and I am proud to say the United States is supporting these much needed projects, with a particular focus on roads that support Haiti's farmers and enable the transport of their goods to market. Since 2011, the United States has helped construct or repair over 63 kilometers of roads in Haiti and over the next five years we are looking to rehabilitate up to 250 kilometers of additional roads. New ports are being planned for Haiti, and old ones rehabilitated. The Government of

Haiti has been working on expanding port access throughout the country; the United States is involved in these efforts.

Haiti's major airports are being renovated. The recently inaugurated passenger terminal at Toussaint Louverture International Airport is a dream come true. I remember walking into that old dilapidated terminal and thinking "SO THIS IS HAITI!" Now the shining new terminal will send a new message to foreign visitors and Haitians alike – Haiti is open for business, and opportunities. The Cap Haitian Airport's recently expanded runway can receive large jet aircraft for the first time in its history, with the promise of new international routes that promote business and tourist travel.

Throughout the country, existing hospitals and schools are being refurbished, and new schools and hospitals are also being built. During the last 24 months, the United States helped refurbish 11 health facilities and rehabilitate 120 semi-permanent schools in partnership with the

Government of Haiti. Currently, we are funding the construction of seven permanent schools. As government revenues grow, Haiti will do even more to ensure its people are well educated and have access to health care. According to a 2012 independent report, the percentage of children enrolled in primary school in Haiti is 77.2%, as opposed to 49.6% in 2005. President Martelly has made access to education one of his government's overarching priorities, and these figures are evidence that Haiti's future generations are being given the opportunity they deserve to succeed.

For too long, Haiti's energy costs have ranked among the highest in the region, and its energy supply has been erratic at best. This is an unacceptable deterrent to investment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. But efforts are underway to improve electricity generation, transmission, and distribution, to upgrade circuits and substations, and to repair aging plants such as the Péligre hydro facility. The United States is playing a role here, as well, with the construction of a 10 megawatt power plant in northern Haiti that will not only provide reliable, affordable

energy to the Caracol Industrial Park, but will supply electricity to communities and businesses that were previously off-grid. We also plan to support the development of a renewable energy plant which will feed the Caracol plant with clean energy, eventually reducing its fuel consumption. In addition, we are currently supporting the efforts of the Government of Haiti to make EDH (Electricité d'Haiti) financially independent, including moving forward with critical repairs to sub-stations in the Port-au-Prince area, and working closely with the utilities Director General to identify additional critical needs; all this as we actively participate in multi-sectorial discussions on how to modernize the electricity sector. The government hopes to boost electrical generation capacity to 500 MW by 2016, which is a laudable and attainable goal if we all work together.

I emphasize these challenges because they are real, and because we must remain focused on addressing them if Haiti's private sector is to succeed. Transformative change can only come through private sector

investment and the jobs it produces. I emphasize everything that is being done to address these challenges because I believe it is important to combat the negativity and the “Haiti Cherie” mentality with which Haiti is too often treated. There is no place for cynicism and back talk, and we don’t have time to waste! We have a lot of good to talk about – let’s start doing that NOW.

I want to end my remarks with a note on cooperation between the government and the private sector in this country. As someone with over thirty years of experience in the development field, I have seen too many well-intentioned government projects that did not involve the private sector, that did not give people a personal stake in their success, and that were therefore unsustainable. Successful economic development must create jobs. It must bring dignity to workers and security to their families. Because of this, I am convinced that the private sector is playing and will continue to play a crucial role in the development of Haiti. I want to commend the government for its recent efforts to reach out to the private

sector, to seek its counsel, and to make it a genuine partner in Haiti's quest for economic independence. I want to commend the business community, including AmCham Haiti, for sharing your experience and ideas in an effort to make this country a better place.

I am very excited to be back in Haiti. Because I sincerely believe that Haiti is at a crucial turning point in its history, full of marvelous opportunities and hope. I believe in the future of Haiti, the U.S. government wants Haiti to succeed, and working together, we can convince the international business community to invest in Haiti and its hard working people. I look forward to working with all of you to make Haiti an even prouder, and more prosperous country. Finally, I want to share with you our new embassy slogan, which is: "We dream, we deliver." Together, we can make Haiti's and Haitians' dreams come true. As I said before HAITI IS TOO RICH TO BE POOR. If you do not

remember anything else that I said tonight, remember that one phrase
because you are the ones responsible for making that richness come to life.

Thank you very much.